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SUBJECT: GOI SEES IMMIGRATION FROM BANGLADESH AS NATIONAL SECURITY THREAT

CLASSIFIED BY: Rosanna Minchew, Poloff, Pol, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (b)

¶11. (U) Classified By: CG Henry V. Jardine for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

¶12. (C) Summary: In recent meetings with Poloff, Indian security services in West Bengal described illegal immigration from Bangladesh as a serious national security threat. The three major areas of concern for the officials were the significant rates of illegal immigration across the border, reported Bangladeshi support of insurgent groups like the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) in Northeast India and the radicalization of political Islam. Complicating factors are rampant corruption amongst Border Security Forces (BSF) and alleged Left Front support for migration to gain Muslim votes. There is now a substantial Muslim community along the border which authorities fear may become radicalized as religious fundamentalism gains more support in Bangladesh. A mushrooming of madrassas, increased communal violence against Hindus and fundamentalist intolerance is of particular concern to BSF authorities, who believe radical elements are using the madrassas to recruit young men. Muslim activists recognize that the population is vulnerable to radicalization, noting that it is an economically deprived, educationally backward and socially handicapped community. However, they maintain that the community is non-violent and that the government of West Bengal has failed to provide them a basic education. Indian security officials are frustrated by the deterioration of security in Bangladesh and the consequences for West Bengal, which politicians are unwilling to debate publicly for fear of alienating Muslim voters. Authorities spoke candidly with U.S. officials on the issue and, to some extent, shared their intelligence on the threat from Bangladesh. Indian authorities and the impoverished Muslim community would welcome increased USG attention to humanitarian conditions and radical elements in Bangladesh to help prevent fundamentalism from gaining a stronghold in India. End Summary.

A Uniquely Porous Border

¶13. (SBU) Representatives of Indian security forces Dilip Mitra, Inspector General of Police, Intelligence, Pradeep Chattopadhyah, Deputy Commissioner of Police and B. B. Nandi, retired Deputy Director of the Research and Analysis Wing candidly related to Poloff their concern that criminal and radical Islamic elements are taking advantage of the porous land border between West Bengal and Bangladesh to infiltrate into India. In addition, a border distinction at the local level is artificial because communities on both sides share historical, cultural and linguistic ties. Further, BSF guards are notoriously corrupt and often accept bribes from immigrants crossing the border illegally. The opposition also accuses the Left Front of giving immigrants instant citizenship and voting rights to maintain and gain support within the Muslim community. Additional BSF forces have been deployed in response to the numbers of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants coming to India and a security fence, currently 60% complete, is under construction. Mitra said that an increased number of BSF guards and the security fence were not having a measurable impact on criminals trafficking in drugs, people and weapons.

Concern: Radical Islamic Elements Infiltrating

¶14. (C) The Indian officials believe radical Islamic elements in Bangladesh enjoy a degree of protection from the government. The authorities are concerned that these elements have a strategic, long-term plan to take advantage of the porous border to infiltrate India and provide support to insurgent groups. Mitra said the police had information from unnamed sources that weapons for use by ULFA were brought in through the Bangladesh/India border. Once inside India, radicals are able to gain influence in border communities, provide support to insurgent movements and use West Bengal as a launching pad to move within India or to travel internationally. The three terrorist organizations of primary interest to Indian authorities monitoring the border are Jamat-ul-Mujahideen (JUM), Jagrata Muslim Janata, Bangladesh (JMJB) and Harkat-ul-Jehadi Islami (HUJI). The contacts said, without identifying the groups, that terrorist organizations previously based in

Afghanistan have moved their operations to Bangladesh where there is less international focus on the fundamentalist Islamic community. They believe three events prompted these unspecified Afghanistan-based groups to move to Bangladesh; the events of September 11, 2001, the more conservative government gaining power in Bangladesh in early 2002 and U.S action in Afghanistan.

Chattopadhyah shared with Poloff the classified text of a report on terrorism in Bangladesh to demonstrate the sincerity of claims that Afghani-based terrorist elements had significant influence amongst Bangladesh-based groups . The translated statements of an unnamed extremist leader in Bangladesh were included in the text and reads as follows: "We shall become Taliban and Bangladesh will become Afghanistan."

Security Services: Border Community is Becoming Radicalized

15. (C) Since 2001, Indian authorities have seen changes in the community near the border suggesting that radical Islamic elements enjoy increasing influence in the area. For example, authorities noted what they describe as a "mushrooming" of madrassas on both the Indian and Bangladeshi side of the border.

The majority of these madrassas are not government regulated and they believe the schools are predominantly being used as recruitment facilities. When asked how the madrassas were being funded, Mitra speculated that the Bangladeshi intelligence apparatus, under the influence of the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate was providing funding from petro-dollars and narco funds, although he had no concrete evidence. When pressed for further details, Mitra said a group calling itself the Revival of Islamic Heritage (RIH) was also providing funding but did not elaborate on the source of his information. Mitra claimed to know that, on the Bangladeshi side of the border, young men were being cloistered in mosques and madrassas during the day and conducting training activities at night. Authorities have noted an increased number of training camps in Bangladesh. On the Indian side of the border, there has been an escalation of violence against Hindus and fatwas threatening moderate voices. Authorities reported an increase in rape cases of Hindu women by Muslim men which they believe is part of the long term strategy by radical Islamists to gain influence and numbers on the Indian side of the border. Mitra went as far as to say he believed the de facto border was approximately 5-10km inside of India.

16. (C) Nandi and Mitra gave examples of fatwas issued by local mullahs designed to intimidate moderates and prevent authorities from recording an accurate number of Muslims in the communities.

Nandi told the story of a school teacher he knew in a border community who had asked for his advice and protection. The teacher was a well known moderate and a fatwa had been issued offering a reward for his murder. Mitra said that he had been asked by his superiors to travel to the border area for a first-hand account of the social climate. He had noticed a disproportionate number of Hindu women to Muslim men. He approached one of the women to ask about the imbalance and learned that the woman was, in fact, a Muslim. She said she was obeying a fatwa ordering Muslim women to dress and adorn themselves as Hindus. Mitra believed this was an effort by a growing radical Islamic element to camouflage itself in the community and to avoid detection.

17. (C) Authorities are also concerned that militants could easily obtain Indian passports and disappear inside the country or use India as a launching pad for international travel. Bangladeshis can easily get fraudulent identification with the help of strong cultural ties and corrupt officials. Indian authorities actively look for illegal immigrants to prosecute or return to Bangladesh. In the case of one investigation, the police were led to Mumbai where they apprehended a man and confiscated four Indian passports.

Muslim Community: Border Area Particularly Poor and Ignored by GOI

18. (SBU) Muslim leaders in West Bengal, including Sultan Ahmed, ex-MLA, Mooruddin Ahmed, Founder Secretary of the Minority Educational Development Program, Suleman Khurshi and Muazzam Hossain also spoke candidly with Poloff about the social and political temperature of Muslim communities in the border areas. They acknowledged growing numbers of madrassas but, unlike security services, believed they did not house radical elements. They said faculty at the madrassas were generally not well educated but did provide a service that the government has been unable or unwilling to do. When asked how the madrassas were being funded, they replied that contributions were solicited from the local community. Interestingly, while Muslim community leaders do not believe that radical elements have taken over the border area, they do believe the community is vulnerable to political exploitation and radicalization due to extreme poverty and hopelessness. Leaders voiced their concern that despite GOWB communist rhetoric of egalitarianism, the Muslims in the community continued to be treated like second-class citizens. They said they would consider mobilizing

behind an opposition party that was able to address their concerns and improve the lot of impoverished Muslims. They also encouraged more American outreach in education and healthcare.

Political Ramifications

19. (U) The deteriorating political climate in Bangladesh and the alarming number of illegal immigrants crossing the border are politically sensitive issues. The Left Front depends on the Muslim vote to retain power and is unwilling to alienate Muslims in the area by more strictly enforcing border control. On the other hand, the government has been unable to provide basic services to the community and improve their poverty stricken lives. While the Chief Minister has publicly voiced concern about illegal immigration, the government of West Bengal has no concrete solution to the problem. Further, the LF shifts blame for lack of effective border control to the central government, using the issue as leverage against the UPA at the center. Local opposition parties allege that the Left encourages illegal immigration to bolster its support base by offering immediate citizenship to immigrants, further complicating efforts to stem immigration and return illegal immigrants to Bangladesh. Elite Muslims in Calcutta believe that the Left has been unable to improve their lot and would be willing to break with the party if a strong opposition emerged. However, it is unclear how Muslim communities along the border would react to the emergence of a strong opposition.

Comment

110. (C) There is a lack of political will to tighten India's border with Bangladesh, especially with West Bengal state elections coming in May 2006, and immigrants continue to flow across the border. There are indications that some immigrants bring with them the radical Islamic views taking a foothold in Bangladesh. Communal violence is increasing and fundamentalists are gaining influence as the demographics in border communities shift. Indian security services worry about what they consider to be a strategic, long-term plan by radical Islamists to infiltrate India and to provide support to various insurgent groups in India like the ULFA. They note a mushrooming of unsanctioned madrassas and an immigrant's ability to disappear inside India with easily obtained false identification. There is consensus that the Muslim community is discriminated against and impoverished. The government of West Bengal has not provided adequately for this marginalized community but continues to have their support and is unwilling to enforce border controls. As a result, illegal immigration continues and fundamentalists gain influence in the area.

JARDINE